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ABSTRACT

A historical overview of the concept of transformational leadership is presented through an analysis of its inherent metaphors, with a focus on the implications for women and ethnic group members. A hermeneutical process within a Foucauldian framework is used to interpret leadership themes in "Little Women" and girl and boy scout handbooks. Findings suggest that historical metaphors have created one culturally acceptable definition of transformational leadership that limits and excludes women and non-Judeo-Christian populations. The author calls for a deconstruction and an understanding of language to perceive the concept of transformational leadership as more than exterior change or a process. (29 references) (LMI)

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Transforming Transformational Leadership: Learning with the Power of the Mind's Eye

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. . . that language stimulates the heart and mind because each language and its words tell us who we are. . .
Greywolf, 1990

Introduction

Transformational leadership is fast becoming the new "buzz" phrase in our education "talk". Schools are no longer re-structured, they are transformed; policy is not top-down but part of a transformational agenda and leadership for the policy and schools of the Twenty-First century involves a transformational style.

The word "transform" appears to suggest a more equitable and multicultural approach to leadership in our schools. Albeit, a new era in our educational history when tranformational leaders could be any combination of the following: female, male, Ojibwe, Black, Latino, and so forth. **Transformational leadership**, the role, style, or process, may offer educators an equal and equitable alternative to other models.

If transformational leadership is itself a model of equal access (yet to be substantiated) does it then offer equity to all? Once again educators find the words are used, distributed, and exposed as if they were neutral terms meaning the same thing to all readers and all leaders. Before leadership can truly be transformed, educators and others must come to understand and value our use of language (Arendt, 1958; Lakoff, 1976; Ozick, 1986).

As the many cultures of the world, and specifically our own native peoples have been tirelessly attempting to teach us, language is who we are (Highwater, 1986). How we use it and how we understand it is specific to each of us and our heritage. Like chromosomes, language is our cultural imprinter. This marker allows us to be more than Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Native Americans; instead, the richness of the tapestry is revealed as Ojibwe, Swedish, Hopi, Polish, Mayan, Irish, Zulu, etc. Words and their metaphors take on a new importance in educational policy and literature if we understand this "meaning and truth" to language.

Epistemological Considerations

Hannah Arendt (1958) wrote about the importance of understanding the historical "connectedness" of a work prior to any real change being able to occur--whether political, cultural, or educational. Knowing, understanding, and thinking about the epistemological implications of a word's use--like **transformation**--assists us in illuminating any hidden biases.

Transformation, the word, is not neutral. This word, like all others in the English language, carries with it historical and personal metaphors. Many of these metaphors arise out of a distinctly Western, Cartesian, and masculine framework (Lakoff, 1976; Highwater, 1986; Mollenhoff, 1990). When these metaphors, resident in the word, become linked with the word **leadership**, a

specific person appears in our mind's eye who we believe will fill that role.

This mind's eye vision is a knowing that is part of our personal as well as cultural history. Metaphors assist us in understanding our world (Ozick, 1986). Thought processes are encoded within the metaphors which may become a source of miscommunication and alienation when communicated as a "truth or fact" to other language groups (Nyholm, 1986; Bowers & Flinders, 1990).

This paper will present a brief historical overview of the phrase "transformational leadership". Specifically, I will focus on historic metaphors that are resident yet unattended in the phrase. The implications of conceptualizing leadership in this manner will be discussed, focusing on the possibilities or limitations the phrase presents for women in leadership.

Methodology

My study begins with the premise that language uses us instead of we using it (Arendt, 1971; Bowers, 1984; Foucault, 1977; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Therefore, in order to reconceptualize transformational leadership, one needs first to understand its historic context. With this foundation in place, we can then begin to define the phrase to include all voices.

Further to understand the implications for today's or tomorrow's women in leadership, I used an interpretation of

historic texts. This method was selected to assist in isolating those past and present metaphors that become part of our language and frame for us the image of leader.

The four Western texts I selected were: The Book of Exodus, The Official Boy Scout Handbook (1916), The Girl Scout Handbook (1953), and Little Women (1868). These texts were selected as examples of historic discourse that framed the values of our dominant culture. Their content represents the "talk" that created the "truth" and metaphors that have been brought forward in our language in association with our conceptualization of leadership (Foucault, 1970).

I selected a hermeneutical process. Hermeneutics in this study is simply interpretation of texts. This methodology is not to be confused with the hermeneutical schools of Gadamer or Habermas but instead refers to the Western theological study of sacred script interpretation. The process, rooted in Western ideology, offers the researcher a path to our hidden Western biases that lie embedded in language.

A Foucauldian lens was used to frame the interpretation of the texts (Foss & Gill, 1986). Foucault's framework illuminated the rules, practices, roles, that created power and knowledge and became part of historic metaphors that assist in defining leadership. Interpreting the text and highlighting the rules, roles, and practices prescribed allowed the metaphors that are part of our language to surface--both organizational and

personal. Implications were then suggested as to how those metaphors might limit a definition of leadership and how that definition decides who may be the leader (Ozick, 1986; Morgan, 1986).

Background

Who are the leaders that are labeled transformational? Does the word cross all cultural groups? Is the word gender specific? In order to begin to suggest answers for the above questions, I will first situate transformational leadership in a historical context.

The word **leadership** is an old English word meaning "to guide on the path." I use the old English definition to support the dominant culture's role of defining words in educational literature. The focus of this paper is not, however, to define leadership. If it were, it would become apparent the above definition does not apply to Laotians arriving from Southeast Asia, Sioux or Hopi peoples struggling for their land in northern Arizona or a newly arrived Polish citizen. In other words, the way we define **leadership** today may have no fidelity with the original meaning nor incorporate the world view's of other cultures (language groups).

Transformation, in turn, can be traced to a Judeo-Christian etymology (Klein, 1988). Transform meaning to change outwardly or an ". . . exterior change of the body brought about by a

personal revelation from God" (Sandmel, ed. 1976. p. 23). In this instance, **transform** contains a spiritual or religious like quality transcending the weaknesses of humankind. **Transform**, it should be remembered, is a less substantive change than transfigure. Only the outward or surface appearance is altered with the use of transform.

In the late nineteenth century, scientific language married itself to religious metaphors. With a more scientific definition, a definition becomes objective, neutral, and fact. Thereby subsuming the historical and cultural context of the word **transform** within an objective and technological process (eg. the explanation of the function of a transformer to electrical current can now be used instead of a Biblical experience).

Again, as in the example of **leadership**, the definition reflects one view of the world either through a Judeo-Christian or scientific paradigm. This view, presented as a universal understanding frames the historical roots as understood by all people and, therefore, unoffending. Assumptions are carried forward within word use as other voices are negated in the defining process.

Current Definitions

James MacGregor Burns (1978) defines transformational leadership as an ability for a leader to engage followers in such a way that they mutually ". . . raise one another to higher

levels of motivation and morality" (p.20). In his quintessential book on leadership, Burns focuses on leadership as a role or process similar to Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Transformational leadership is more than getting people to do a task per se, Burns wrote, it is instead a moral calling.

> Transforming leadership, while more complex, is more potent. . . transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need. . . [and] looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs; and engages the full person of the follower. . . a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (Burns, 1978, p. 4).

"That people can be lifted into their better selves is the secret of transforming leadership. . . " (Burns, 1978, P. 462).

Transformational Leadership as a Calling

There is a current "call" for leadership. The United States consistently talks and writes about the importance of leadership. Transformational leadership may meet the requirements as we move into a new decade. This leader combines the qualities of a good, visionary, and effective leader with one of moral fibre.

Education requires leaders that will answer a calling (Weber, 1924). As in a Protestant sense, a transformational

leader answers a higher order call. Like a pastor, this leader does not promise goods but rather asks for followers to sacrifice (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1965).

The use of the term "transformational", in light of Burns' research on the subject, might cause us to ask if our leadership pendulum is swinging toward a more spiritual definition of leadership. This term appears on the surface to be less "scientific" then its cousins: situational, instructional, or authoritative.

When attached to words like: schools or policy, our mind's eye may picture spiritual metaphor (Western?) and perhaps a better way to view and deal with troublesome issues in education. But that definition too becomes problematic when role models are presented. This type of leadership, much like Western religion, appears to exclude women.

Burns lists the following as exemplars of this form of leadership: Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Mao Tse-Tung (Burns, 1978). These examples appear to crossover into the results from Kohlberg's study (except for Mao). Women, historically, and in Burns' leadership review, appear to be found "wanting" in the area of moral development and, therefore, have yet to emerge as transformational leaders.

Findings

My findings suggest that historical metaphors have created a one best definition of transformational leadership. Embedded in

that definition is a limited and perhaps non-existent role for women. Transformational leadership may remain masculine focused because the definition itself is held prisoner by the word's historic roots. That is not to say that women have not, in their own literature, sustained the same metaphors.

Our language and metaphors behind each word are not neutral, but frame boys/mens and girls/women, conceptual understandings (Lakoff, R. 1976; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Ozick, 1986; Nyholm, 1988). Texts and organizations often carry primary socializations to the word--**leadership**. A skewed communicative competence occurs which translates into our first understandings of this word. Eventually as we grow, these primary metaphors hold a limiting or expansive potential for how each of us comes to understand who should be a leader and what leadership looks like (Dunlap & Cooper, 1989).

These early metaphors frame our conceptual understandings in powerful ways. They are pervasive, containing assumptions which are gender specific, age specific, and culture specific. Examples of these assumptions lie in great texts, novels, handbooks, cartoons, and Educational research and literature.

The following is an example of how leadership has been framed historically for women. In this example, I shall draw from the following texts: Little Women (1868); The Official Handbook for Boys (1916); and Girl Scout Handbook (1953).

Little Women, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts

In Alcott's classic novel, Little Women, formal and informal education models are used to teach the March girls how to become "little women". No matter how independent Marmee and the daughters appear, the story line suggests that these women are only able to function because of the guiding hand of the absent Reverend March, the benevolent nature of Mr. Lawrence, and the guiding words of Pilgrims Progress.

Roles for women included: wife, sister, mother, and social volunteer. Jo March, represents many of our adolescent desires. She is the daughter who most often displayed antithetical "little woman" attributes and offered a look at a young woman in a role as: inventor, creator, leader, risk-taker, and transformer.

Will Jo be controlled or will she have a career, travel, and independence. Her ambitions are held in check by a love and desire to please her father. Many readers identify with this dilemma.

The discursive practices of Alcott's era supported the dichotomies expressed in Little Women: good and bad, male and female (Stern, 1984). Good and bad were applied differently to each gender. Characteristics displayed by Jo, were undesirable for a female and lauded in a male. Leadership belonged to men as did voice, careers, and education. Jo directed drama, dueled with Laurie, and led during a dance--these practices were "bad".

Through the guidance of women, her father, and Pilgrim's Progress, Jo eventually finds a man to tend to and forsakes her career. With this decision, Jo is proclaimed by her father to be his "little woman" (Alcott, 1868, p. 365).

Rules for the roles and practices are gender specific and guided by a Protestant ethic (Stern, 1984). Men are "called" to work; women are called to the home or charity. Self-sacrifice is a feminine virtue becomes the way to transcend ones female frailties. Beth, one of the younger sisters, throughout the story is the model of self-sacrifice. She is eventually transformed through death from an "earthly angel" to a "heavenly angel" (Alcott, 1868).

Women speak when men are not around, but as Jo so aptly described, "Things change between us when men enter the picture" (Alcott, 1868, p. 189). Women are expected to concur with male statements. Although Jo throughout most of the book does not follow this rule, it is expected that she will change once she marries Professor Baher. Marmee, the mother, most often speaks using the words of Reverend March or Pilgrims Progress. "Remember, my girls, to honor your Father's words, so that when you marry you can be helpful to your chosen partners" (Alcott, 1868, p. 56).

These rules, roles, and practices support the metaphors of women as followers. Women are morally weaker, and require daily study of the scripture. They are capable of assisting young

children but must have assistance when raising adolescents (Alcott, 1875).

Metaphors, from this era, and carried forward in our language send powerful messages to girls. Today, Little Women's popularity continues. It has been translated into 65 languages and is also seen as a cartoon and as a computer program. Metaphors that suggest specific roles and rules for young girls that differ from boys continues to be taught and may limit our pool of future leaders.

Two other texts have also had an effect on today's educational leaders as well as those of tomorrow. The Official Handbook for Boys (1916) and the Girl Scout Handbook (1953) have trained many of our men and women. Both texts frame roles, rules, and practices for boys and girls. The texts have changed and continued to evolve as they begin to understand how the language of the handbooks guides the youth in their organizations.

Both the Handbook for Boys and the Girl Scout Handbook of 1916 were similar. The rules, roles, and practices for the boys centered around the "Golden Rule, Ten Commandments, and Scout Law". This handbook (boys) was developed to assist in the training of United States leaders of tomorrow. Their roles were that of protector of democracy, nature, and women/children (not necessarily in that order). A hierarchy or authority chain was

established in the troop so that each boy had an opportunity to work with the process of government. Boys were expected to be self-sufficient and to undertake at an early age a search for a calling or profession (Boy Scouts of America, 1916).

Juliet Low's Girl Scouts were also founded to assist young girls to understand their role in a democratic country. The first handbooks were extensive much like the Boy Scout Handbook. The book covered everything from raising and killing of chickens, horse wrangling, and flag folding. Leadership was not a theme but following or assisting framed the roles for girls.

Girls may have been followers, but they were not to give up their virginity early as Mrs. Low warned. Much like the March girls in Alcott's classic, girls were to be prepared to handle any situation if a man is not around. At all other times, a girl should practice etiquette and social rules in order to take her proper place at her husband's side (Low, 1913).

The Girl Scout Handbook of 1953 reinforced the future role of mother, teacher, nurse, and helpmate. Again, leadership for girls is only addressed in the description of the troop leader. Throughout the handbook, activities focus on rules, roles, practices as related to authority--most often male (Girl Scout Handbook, 1953). This handbook differs from the Boy Scout Handbook which discusses leadership roles for boys and young men.

Girls are asked to explain the Girl Scout Laws in relation to one of six domestic chores like setting a table or making a

bed. There is also a choice using a compass and a map, but the map illustrated in the Handbook does not take the girl very far from home. In contrast, boys are expected to respond to a similar exercise using the Boy Scout Laws in relation to their patrol, their community, and their country.

Scouting today has begun to address gender, culture, and leadership issues. Boys are not expected to take care of everyone and girls are introduced to concepts of leadership. Both organizations are attempting to address the absence of others' culture views and, specifically, to present a more factual representation of Native Americans.

Yet the metaphors from Alcott's era and those of early scouting have educated many of today's leaders and policy writers. If those metaphors are left unaddressed, it may require another one hundred years before we see leadership diversified. **Transformational leadership**, as defined in the literature today, is guided by those limiting metaphors. Burns and other authors on leadership have as part of their language those metaphors that hold women and minorities in very specific roles. A "spiritual" definition of leadership may indeed assist in breaking many of the historical rules, roles, and practices. However, a caveat must be given for "spiritual" can not just encompass the metaphors of a Judeo-Christian or Protestant population. The definition must include spirituality as represented in the many religions of our country.

Conclusion--Or Where do we go from here

For as Greywolf, the Ojibwe elder said during the month of sharing stories, we must remain patient for ". . . language stimulates the heart and mind because each language and its words tell us who we are" (Greywolf, 1990). First we must understand our language and its history prior to accepting new phrases as egalitarian or emancipatory. Only in that way will we as educators and leaders begin to transform the transformational metaphors? With that purposeful de-construction and understanding of our language, perhaps communication will improve between all people and across genders. In this way transformational leadership becomes more than someone or a process--more than only exterior change. Transforming, transformational becomes transfiguration. Spirituality and science are changed to be more than a Western view or a masculine view--more than White or female. Instead, leadership becomes a "guide on the path" not a controller of vision. Leadership is then open to many definitions and the guider becomes the guided in a truly emancipatory way.

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